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SPORTS

Winchester Youth Soccer girls team wins five straight to lock up the Division 1 state title

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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The Winchester Youth Soccer Grade 7-8 girls team is proudly posing with the Division 1 MTOC (Massachusetts Tournament of Champions) state championship plaque, while also wearing their first-place medals after defeating Wilmington, 1-0 in the title game at Lancaster on June 29. They are, from left, front row, Charlotte Bjerke and Emma Wignell. Second row, Elise Alvares, Audrey Houllahan, Ashley Mitchell, Alex Shevland, Lila Czerepak, Izzie Waterbury, Vivian Shanley, Ayla Capone, Gracie Infurna and Solana Murphy. Mi[illegible] photo, Josie Monk, Emma O'Riordan, Carolyn Collins, Rynn Fitzpatrick-Canfield, Stella Garcia, [illegible] McGrath and Daisy Roeder. COURTESY PHOTO

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On the 40th anniversary of the Massachusetts Tournament of Champions (MTOC) playoffs, the Winchester Youth Soccer Grade 7-8 girls team, named the Avalanche, won the Division 1 state championship at Lancaster's Progin Park.

The tournament was a three-day event that ran from June 27-29. It traditionally marks the end of the spring youth soccer season on all levels for both boys and girls teams.

The Avalanche got to Lancaster last weekend after coming out on top in the BAYS League playoffs (Boston Area Youth Soccer), arguably the most competitive conference in the state.

"Winning the MTOC was a goal that this team set out to accomplish way back in the third grade," said Coach Mike Houllahan, "but first, we had to win a six-team playoff in our league, and we did so after earning a bye and winning two straight games that culminated with a 1-0 triumph over Belmont (on June 23 in Medfield). We were now halfway home to our goal."

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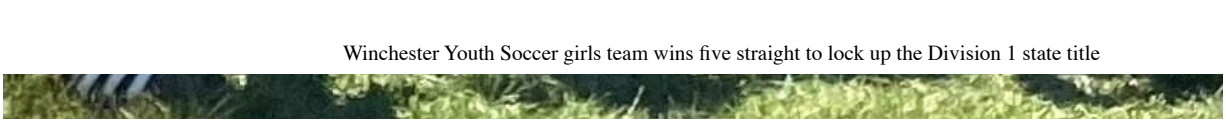

The Winchester Youth Soccer Grade 7-8 girls team hoists the Division 1 MTOC (Massachusetts Tournament of Champions) state championship Cup after beating Wilmington in the finale on June 29 at Lancaster's Progin Park, 1-0. COURTESY PHOTO

The Winchester girls were then able to maintain that momentum to win five straight MTOC Division 1 games over three days to secure the ultimate prize. They first went 3-0 in group play to begin the tournament, starting off with a 7-0 statement win over undefeated Agawam, the Roots Soccer League champion. That league is made up of teams in the western part of the state.

Striker Gracie Infurna paced the attack with three goals, while midfielders Daisy Roeder and Alex Shevland played with grit and determination to help their teammates shutout their Agawam foes, according to Houllahan.

The Avalanche then escaped past Bridgewater, the SSSL (South Shore Soccer League) champs, 3-2, before blanking Melrose, 2-0. Emma Wignell netted the clincher in the third game, with Vivian Shanley getting that all-important helper on the insurance tally after turning in a highlight reel play.

"We dominated Melrose in large part due to the stellar goalkeeping of Shaylen McGrath in the first half to go along with the energy that she then brought to an undermanned and tired team with her play up top in the second half," said Houllahan.

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It was then onto the semifinals, where the Avalanche faced Norton in what turned out to be its toughest competition of the tournament, "but we ended up playing our best game of the tournament, highlighted by our dominance in the middle," said Houllahan.

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The coach specifically singled out center-midfielder Lila Czerepak, because she was first to every ball and won every battle in the middle against Norton. He also mentioned that attacking center-back Izzie Waterbury stopped every Norton challenge, continuing what she had been doing so well all season long.

Their efforts allowed newly minted wing backs Solana Murphy, who is still waiting for someone to get by her, and Audrey Houllahan to start virtually every rush on offense. Houllahan specifically finished the last rush of the game off by taking a sweet feed from Alex Shevland, before blasting a shot that almost went through the back of the net to account for the third and final goal of the game.

They went on to beat Norton, 3-0.

It was then on to the championship game against Wilmington, where they faced an incredible goalkeeper, who made over 12 saves to keep things close on the scoreboard. But in the end, Winchester was able to persevere, 1-0.

The Avalanche relied once again on its solid defense, led by goalie Ayla Capone. She played the first half in goal, before bringing much needed energy and hustle to the team as a position player in the second half.

The game was scoreless until the Avalanche finally broke through on a Charlotte Bjerke header off a corner kick by attacking center-midfielder Elise Alvares, who was brilliant throughout the tournament, according to Houllahan. Alvares was able to place a perfect kick to Bjerke, who put both star striker Ashley Mitchell and the ball into the net together. There was just a question on who scored the goal. Mitchell already had enough goals, four to be exact, throughout the weekend tournament at striker, so it was decided to let Bjerke, the star center-back, share in the champio glory.

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“It was a true team effort,” said Houllahan.

Josie Monk, Emma O’Riordan, Carolyn Collins, Rynn Fitzpatrick-Canfield and Stella Garcia couldn’t play in the state tournament, but they still contributed to the championship season by helping their teammates succeed in the BAYS League regular season and playoffs.

Houllahan also had help throughout this championship effort from the team’s other coaches Pete Czerepak and Mark Waterbury.

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Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

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weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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SPORTS

Winchester boys hockey advances to the Sweet 16 after beating Wachusett in the tournament opener

The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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SPORTS

With postseason starting Friday night, WHS boys hoop seniors English, Sarpong, Burbine join Middlesex League elite

The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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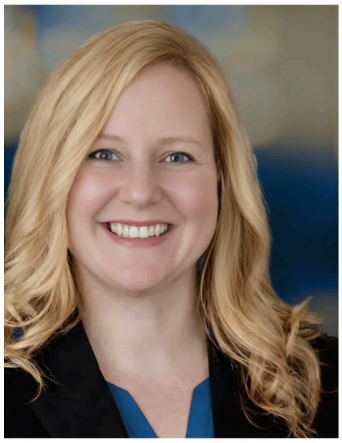

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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